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ABSTRACT

The role of the school psychologist has been the subject of debate and criticism for the past 26 years. Five major role functions have emerged: assessment; consultation; intervention and counseling; research and evaluation; and administration. Thus within the school environment, ambiguity of the role of the school psychologist exists because school personnel may be unaware of the duties, obligations, training, and skills of the school psychologist. This study describes perceptions school personnel have of the school psychologist and determines if discrepancies exist between perception of ideal versus actual roles. School personnel (n=278) completed surveys and participated in discussions concerning the role of school psychologists. Findings indicate that general education faculty hold a narrow view of the roles and responsibilities of the school psychologist. Contact with the school psychologist was described as minimal and usually entailed a case conference meeting or a classroom observation with a behavioral checklist to be completed by the teacher. The increased amount of contact administrators and special education faculty reported appears to have provided them with better understanding of ideal and actual roles. The special education faculty look to the school psychologist for a complete and accurate assessment of a child in order to make the best determination of placement and programming for the child. Implications of these findings are discussed. (MKA)

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Role Perceptions of the School Psychologist By School Personnel

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INTRODUCTION

The role of the school psychologist has been the subject of debate and criticism for the past twenty-six years (Johnson, 1990). Five major role functions have emerged including: assessment, consultation, intervention and counseling, research and evaluation, and administration.

Schools offer many opportunities for all professional personnel. Individuals focus on various tasks to benefit learners, teachers, and the school organization as a whole. In order to maintain quality within the school setting, individuals must interact well with others working in the same setting and must also understand the roles of others within the environment. Ambiguity of the role of the school psychologist may exist because even effective and informed school personnel may be unaware of the duties, obligations, training and skills of the school psychologist (Kramer & Epps, 1991).

The purpose of this study was to describe perceptions of school personnel of the school psychologist and to determine if discrepancies exist between perception of ideal vs. actual roles.

METHODS

Elementary, middle, and high school personnel from four school corporations in Indiana and Illinois served as participants. The sample included 278 individuals representing nine administrators, 240 general education teachers, 11 special education teachers, two area specialty teachers and 16 other school personnel (counselors, teacher aides). Each person had previous experience with a licensed school psychologist in the school setting and had been employed by their present school corporation for a minimum of two years.

Two survey instruments were developed to collect the data. First, a 12-item questionnaire utilizing a six-point Likert-type scale was developed to assess perceptions of school psychologists. Second, a performance rating scale was developed to assess the perceptions of ideal and actual roles of the school psychologist.

The surveys were distributed randomly to school personnel who met the inclusion criteria on designated inservice days in the schools. The researcher provided the instructions to all groups and personally collected the questionnaires at each inservice meeting. Discussion followed the collection of the surveys to provide a more accurate understanding of the role of the school psychologist as perceived by the participating individuals. Percentages of personnel responding to each perception item are provided by school level and by type of educator. Data have been collapsed across categories and are summarized by "disagree" and "agree". Reporting actual vs. ideal roles of school psychologists were determined by collapsing the percentage values of personnel at fifty percent or greater for each. A difference figure is provided between actual and ideal role definitions.

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RESULTS

Over one-half of all school personnel surveyed viewed school psychologists as a guest within the school building rather than a member of the school staff.

Over one-half of the elementary and middle school staff members and 66 percent of the high school personnel regarded follow-up sessions with parents and teachers concerning interventions as an important role for school psychologists. School professionals would like for at least 21-49 percent of the school psychologists time be spent with behavioral interventions; at least 50-75 percent of their time should be devoted to prevention activities, and 11-20 percent of time be spent in consultation.

Fifty-four percent of the special education faculty would prefer that a school psychologist collaborate with teachers to develop prereferral interventions. Over 90 percent of the same group want the school psychologist involved in implementation of classroom interventions.

Eleven to 49 percent of all respondents indicate they would like school psychologists to be involved with staff and community and organizational development including training sessions to assist parents and teachers with issues of concern.

Nearly 90 percent of all respondents would prefer that a school psychologist spend their time in special education programs and placement activities.

DISCUSSION

Findings indicate general education faculty holds a narrow view of the roles and responsibilities of the school psychologist. Contact with the school psychologist was described as minimal and usually entailed a case conference meeting or a classroom observation and behavioral checklist to be completed by the teacher.

The increased amount of contact administrators and special education faculty reported with a school psychologist appears to have provided them with a better understanding of ideal and actual roles. The special education faculty looks to the school psychologist for a complete and accurate assessment of a child in order to make the best determination of placement and programming for the child.

Administrators are central to the understanding of the role of the modern school psychologists. Their views diverged consistently from the views of other school personnel and they held views more consistent with previously held views by teachers. It appears that teacher's views are more consistent with modern training philosophies. Careful examination of the differences between administrators and directors of training will be important in helping school psychology adopt new roles.

IMPLICATIONS

The current professional identity of school psychology encompasses a variety of role expectations ascribed by other professionals within the school environment as well as those role expectations institutionalized by training programs. Prominent among the roles from both sources is formal assessment activities included in the evaluations of students for special education eligibility and placement. Behavior modification plans to address issues identified within the formal assessment processes follow closely as a primary role expectation. Expanding use of intervention teams to assist in special education assessment and

development of behavioral plan has expanded the awareness of both general education and special education teachers.

Ideal vs. actual role differences suggests that training programs must address the issue of the role of the modern school psychologists. In many cases the teachers are ahead of administrators in understanding the many diverse services that may be provided by school psychologists. Education of school administrators regarding new roles will be essential to the success of assessment and intervention programs to address the many special needs that children present in today's schools.

Figure 1

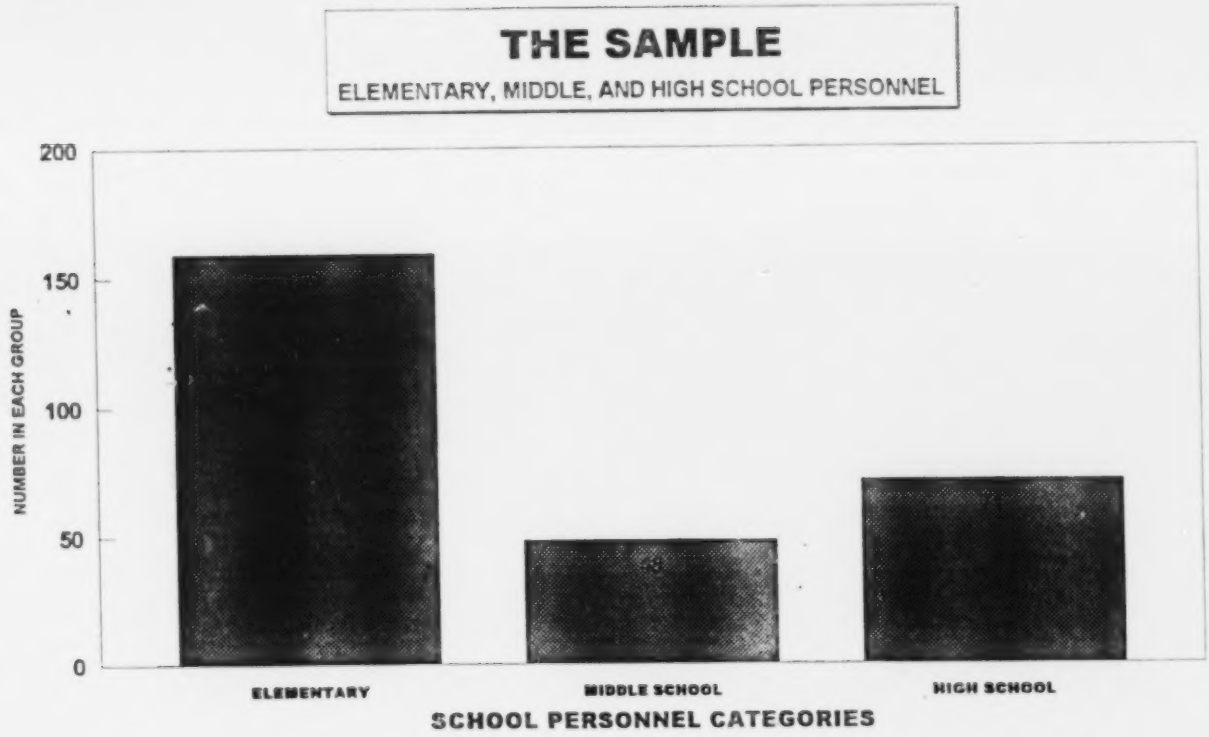

Table 1

The School Psychologist is a Guest Within the School Building Rather Than Regular Staff

School Level	Disagree	Agree	NA
ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS			
GEN ED	51%	48%	1%
SP ED	**33%**	**67%**	**0%**
AREA SP	50%	0%	50%
ADM	25%	75%	0%
OTHER	42%	42%	17%
MIDDLE SCHOOLS			
GEN ED	**30%**	**60%**	**9%**
SP ED	**50%**	**50%**	**0%**
AREA SP	0%	0%	
ADM	0%	0%	
OTHER	100%	0%	0%
HIGH SCHOOLS			
GEN ED	42%	45%	12%
SP ED	100%	0%	0%
AREA SP	0%	0%	
ADM	**0%**	**100%**	**0%**
OTHER	**0%**	**67%**	**33%**
TOTAL			
GEN ED	**45%**	**50%**	**5%**
SP ED	**45%**	**55%**	**0%**
AREA SP	50%	0%	50%
ADM	**22%**	**78%**	**0%**
OTHER	38%	44%	19%

Table 2

The School Psychologist Follows Up with Parents and Teachers Following Intervention

School Level	Disagree	Agree	NA
ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS			
GEN ED	**41%**	**51%**	**8%**
SP ED	50%	50%	0%
AREA SP	0%	50%	50%
ADM	25%	75%	0%
OTHER	0%	0%	
MIDDLE SCHOOLS			
GEN ED	**30%**	**53%**	**16%**
SP ED	100%	0%	0%
AREA SP	0%	0%	
ADM	0%	0%	
OTHER	0%	100%	0%
HIGH SCHOOLS			
GEN ED	32%	42%	26%
SP ED	0%	100%	0%
AREA SP	**0%**	**0%**	
ADM	**17%**	**67%**	**17%**
OTHER	33%	33%	33%
TOTAL			
GEN ED	**37%**	**49%**	**14%**
SP ED	64%	36%	0%
AREA SP	**0%**	**50%**	**50%**
ADM	20%	70%	10%
OTHER	25%	50%	25%

Table 3

The Schoo l Psychologist Collaborates with Teachers to Develop Classroom Interventions for Children

School Level		Disagree	Agree	NA
ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS				
	GEN ED	37%	60%	3%
	SP ED	50%	50%	0%
	AREA SP	0%	50%	50%
	ADM	13%	88%	0%
	OTHER	17%	75%	8%
MIDDLE SCHOOLS				
	GEN ED	44%	44%	12%
	SP ED	75%	25%	0%
	AREA SP	0%	0%	
	ADM	0%	0%	
	OTHER	50%	0%	50%
HIGH SCHOOLS				
	GEN ED	38%	42%	20%
	SP ED	0%	100%	0%
	AREA SP	0%	0%	
	ADM	0%	100%	0%
	OTHER	33%	33%	33%
TOTAL				
	GEN ED	39%	52%	9%
	SP ED	55%	45%	0%
	AREA SP	0%	50%	50%
	ADM	11%	89%	0%
	OTHER	24%	59%	18%

Table 4

The School Psychologist Collaborates with Teachers to Implement Classroom Interventions for Children

School Level		Disagree	Agre
ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS			
	GEN ED	5.3%	45% 50%
	SP ED	0.0%	83% 17%
	AREA SP	50.0%	0% 50%
	ADM	0.0%	100% 0%
	OTHER	8.3%	25% 67%
MIDDLE SCHOOLS			
	GEN ED	11.6%	49% 40%
	SP ED	0.0%	100% 0%
	AREA SP		0% 0%
	ADM		0% 0%
	OTHER	100.0%	0% 0%
HIGH SCHOOLS			
	GEN ED	18.2%	50% 32%
	SP ED	0.0%	100% 0%
	AREA SP		0% 0%
	ADM	0.0%	100% 0%
	OTHER	33.3%	33% 33%
TOTAL			
	GEN ED	10.0%	47% 43%
	SP ED	0.0%	93% 7%
	AREA SP	50.0%	0% 50%
	ADM	0.0%	100% 0%
	OTHER	18.8%	25% 56%

Table 5

Actual vs. Ideal Behavioral Intervention

SCHOOL LEVEL		ACTUAL 50-100 %	IDEAL 50-100 %	DIFFERENCE ACTUAL /IDEAL
ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS				
	GEN ED	2%	38%	36%
	SP ED	0%	17%	17%
	AREA SP	0%	0%	0%
	ADM	0%	0%	0%
	OTHER	0%	25%	25%
MIDDLE SCHOOLS				
	GEN ED	2%	14%	12%
	SP ED	0%	25%	25%
	AREA SP	0%	0%	0%
	ADM	0%	0%	0%
	OTHER	0%	0%	0%
HIGH SCHOOLS				
	GEN ED	3%	23%	20%
	SP ED	0%	100%	100%
	AREA SP	0%	0%	0%
	ADM	0%	0%	0%
	OTHER	0%	0%	0%
TOTAL				
	GEN ED	3%	30%	27%
	SP ED	0%	27%	27%
	AREA SP	0%	0%	0%
	ADM	0%	0%	0%
	OTHER	0%	19%	19%

Table 6

Actual vs Ideal; Community Organizational Development

SCHOOL LEVEL		ACTUAL 50-100 %	IDEAL 50-100 %	DIFFERENCE ACTUAL /IDEAL
ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS				
	GEN ED	2%	13%	11%
	SP ED	0%	0%	0%
	AREA SP	0%	0%	0%
	ADM	0%	13%	13%
	OTHER	0%	0%	0%
MIDDLE SCHOOLS				
	GEN ED	2%	9%	7%
	SP ED	0%	25%	25%
	AREA SP	0%	0%	0%
	ADM	0%	0%	0%
	OTHER	0%	0%	0%
HIGH SCHOOLS				
	GEN ED	3%	15%	12%
	SP ED	0%	0%	0%
	AREA SP	0%	0%	0%
	ADM	0%	0%	0%
	OTHER	0%	0%	0%
TOTAL				
	GEN ED	2%	13%	11%
	SP ED	0%	9%	9%
	AREA SP	0%	0%	0%
	ADM	0%	11%	11%
	OTHER	0%	0%	0%

Table 7

Actual vs Ideal; Consultation with Teachers

SCHOOL LEVEL		ACTUAL 50-100 %	IDEAL 50-100 %	DIFFERENCE ACTUAL /IDEAL
ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS				
	GEN ED	6%	27%	21%
	SP ED	0%	50%	50%
	AREA SP	0%	0%	0%
	ADM	25%	13%	-13%
	OTHER	0%	17%	17%
MIDDLE SCHOOLS				
	GEN ED	7%	33%	26%
	SP ED	0%	50%	50%
	AREA SP	0%	0%	0%
	ADM	0%	0%	0%
	OTHER	0%	0%	0%
HIGH SCHOOLS				
	GEN ED	11%	18%	7%
	SP ED	100%	100%	0%
	AREA SP	0%	0%	0%
	ADM	0%	0%	0%
	OTHER	0%	0%	0%
TOTAL				
	GEN ED	7%	26%	18%
	SP ED	9%	55%	45%
	AREA SP	0%	0%	0%
	ADM	22%	11%	-11%
	OTHER	0%	13%	13%

Table 8

Actual vs Ideal; Parent Education

SCHOOL LEVEL		ACTUAL 50-100 %	IDEAL 50-100 %	DIFFERENCE ACTUAL /IDEAL
ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS				
	GEN ED	2%	23%	21%
	SP ED	0%	17%	17%
	AREA SP	0%	0%	0%
	ADM	0%	13%	13%
	OTHER	0%	17%	17%
MIDDLE SCHOOLS				
	GEN ED	5%	26%	21%
	SP ED	0%	25%	25%
	AREA SP	0%	0%	0%
	ADM	0%	0%	0%
	OTHER	0%	0%	0%
HIGH SCHOOLS				
	GEN ED	5%	23%	18%
	SP ED	0%	100%	100%
	AREA SP	0%	0%	0%
	ADM	0%	0%	0%
	OTHER	0%	0%	0%
TOTAL				
	GEN ED	3%	23%	20%
	SP ED	0%	27%	27%
	AREA SP	0%	0%	0%
	ADM	0%	11%	11%
	OTHER	0%	13%	13%

Table 9

Participating in Sp. Ed. Placement & Program

SCHOOL LEVEL		ACTUAL 50-100 %	IDEAL 50-100 %	DIFFERENCE ACTUAL /IDEAL
ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS				
	GEN ED	18%	23%	5%
	SP ED	50%	50%	0%
	AREA SP	0%	0%	0%
	ADM	13%	13%	0%
	OTHER	8%	25%	17%
MIDDLE SCHOOLS				
	GEN ED	26%	26%	0%
	SP ED	50%	50%	0%
	AREA SP	0%	0%	0%
	ADM	0%	0%	0%
	OTHER	0%	0%	0%
HIGH SCHOOLS				
	GEN ED	14%	17%	3%
	SP ED	100%	100%	0%
	AREA SP	0%	0%	0%
	ADM	0%	0%	0%
	OTHER	33%	0%	-33%
TOTAL				
	GEN ED	18%	22%	3%
	SP ED	55%	55%	0%
	AREA SP	0%	0%	0%
	ADM	11%	11%	0%
	OTHER	13%	19%	6%

Table 10

Actual vs Ideal: Prereferral Intervention

SCHOOL LEVEL		ACTUAL 50-100 %	IDEAL 50-100 %	DIFFERENCE ACTUAL /IDEAL
ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS				
	GEN ED	3%	21%	18%
	SP ED	0%	33%	33%
	AREA SP	0%	0%	0%
	ADM	13%	13%	0%
	OTHER	0%	0%	0%
MIDDLE SCHOOLS				
	GEN ED	7%	16%	9%
	SP ED	0%	25%	25%
	AREA SP	0%	0%	0%
	ADM	0%	0%	0%
	OTHER	0%	0%	0%
HIGH SCHOOLS				
	GEN ED	6%	18%	12%
	SP ED	0%	50%	50%
	AREA SP	0%	0%	0%
	ADM	0%	0%	0%
	OTHER	0%	0%	0%
TOTAL				
	GEN ED	5%	20%	15%
	SP ED	0%	33%	33%
	AREA SP	0%	0%	0%
	ADM	11%	11%	0%
	OTHER	0%	0%	0%

Table 11

Actual vs Ideal: Prevention Activities

SCHOOL LEVEL		ACTUAL 50-100 %	IDEAL 50-100 %	DIFFERENCE ACTUAL /IDEAL
ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS				
	GEN ED	2%	21%	19%
	SP ED	0%	50%	50%
	AREA SP	0%	0%	0%
	ADM	13%	13%	0%
	OTHER	0%	0%	0%
MIDDLE SCHOOLS				
	GEN ED	5%	21%	16%
	SP ED	0%	25%	25%
	AREA SP	0%	0%	0%
	ADM	0%	0%	0%
	OTHER	0%	0%	0%
HIGH SCHOOLS				
	GEN ED	3%	15%	12%
	SP ED	0%	100%	100%
	AREA SP	0%	0%	0%
	ADM	0%	0%	0%
	OTHER	0%	0%	0%
TOTAL				
	GEN ED	3%	19%	17%
	SP ED	0%	45%	45%
	AREA SP	0%	0%	0%
	ADM	11%	11%	0%
	OTHER	0%	0%	0%

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